

BPC Election Statement & CORD Caucus Announcement

Our Response to the Election

Last month, members of NUGW-UE voted to ratify our first contract by a vote of 1713 (72.6%) to 647 (27.4%). As members of the Best Possible Contract Coalition, we believed that through organizing a no vote and continuing strike mobilization, we could secure larger wage increases, back pay, and key benefits and protections for our most vulnerable members. While we didn't win the vote, we respect the democratic decision of union membership and celebrate the monumental achievement of securing our first union contract. **The contract is a culmination of years of organizing and commitment from thousands of grad workers across Northwestern who fought to secure union recognition and move the administration during bargaining.** The gains in this contract will make a meaningful difference in many grad workers' lives and represent an important starting point in our movement to transform working conditions at Northwestern.

We are very proud of the campaign that the NUGW Best Possible Contract Coalition ran. This rank-and-file movement achieved a higher percentage of "no" votes than many similar campaigns including in recent ratification votes by the [California Faculty Association](#) (24%), [SAG-AFTRA](#) (22%), and [Teamster's UPS](#) (14%). **As [this article in Labor Notes](#) outlines, strong "vote no" campaigns—win or lose—are a sign of a grassroots union that is well-positioned for additional future gains.** These campaigns indicate a high level of rank-and-file engagement, the presence of healthy democratic debate and deliberation, and an eagerness among many union organizers to fight to raise industry standards. Indeed, the ratification vote had the highest level of turnout of any election in NUGW history, with about 70-75% of eligible grad workers casting a ballot. High member participation bodes well for our ability to put up successful fights and secure additional wins in the coming years. Throughout the campaign, we were heartened to hear members across the union—both "yes" and "no" voters—express that they were ready to keep organizing regardless of the outcome of the vote. We are excited to join our co-workers in future fights and believe our union will come out of this vote stronger and more unified than ever.

Launching a Union Caucus

Now that the contract is ratified, the fight for mid-contract improvements begins! **We are excited to announce that we are launching an NUGW [union caucus](#)—CORD (Caucus Organizing for Rank-and-File Democracy), which is open to all grad workers.** Organizers from our caucus plan to wage issue campaigns to fight for critical benefits and protections outside of our existing contract. We believe these fights simply can't wait for our contract renegotiation in three years. Pre-legal recognition, NUGW ran successful issue campaigns that included securing 5th year summer funding, paid medical leave for grad workers, and the elimination of international student fees. We can build upon this strategy to organize around several issues that were identified as priorities in the ratification debate, including: 1) dependent health care coverage; 2) improved protections related to sexual violence; 3) ADA audits of campus facilities; 4)

expanded financial support for international students; 5) raises for MM and DMA grad workers in Bienen, and 6) guaranteed 6th year funding for grad workers outside of Weinberg. **We invite NUGW-UE members to join CORD in organizing around these critical fights and to share their priorities and ideas for other campaigns by filling out our [interest form](#).**

The bargaining process and dependent care referendum also brought into focus the need to strengthen rank-and-file democratic processes in our union—a key priority for CORD. As the [work of labor organizing and scholarship](#) has shown, strong union democracy is essential to collective power and can lead to larger gains at the bargaining table. **This means we must improve transparency and responsiveness from elected leadership, increase avenues for member participation and input in decision-making, create forums that allow members to respectfully talk through disagreement and build consensus, and center the priorities of our most marginalized and vulnerable grad workers.** To achieve this, we believe that we must build infrastructure for organizing, member deliberation, and rank-and-file decision-making across labs, programs, departments, and the union as a whole. Expanding the role of our union working groups for marginalized communities of grad workers is also critical. Additionally, we support adopting [a model of high-participation, open-bargaining](#) in future negotiations, which peer unions like TRU-UE at Johns Hopkins used and cited as instrumental in [securing their recent boundary-pushing contract wins](#). Lastly, we believe our union governance system should include robust checks and balances including a referendum process with guardrails to prevent interference and obstruction.

Over the coming weeks and months, we will have elections for the new NUGW-UE Constitution Committee and Officers. These elections will play a pivotal role in shaping the direction and priorities of our union. **We encourage every union member to engage in these democratic processes by voting, sharing their ideas, asking questions, nominating candidates, and running for office if they are so inspired.** It is democratic participation and collective action that will ultimately power our movement to transform Northwestern and higher education more broadly. Let's get to work!

In Solidarity,

NUGW Caucus Organizing for Rank-and-File Democracy (CORD)